



FILM: **THE TEACHERS' LOUNGE**

FDG RATING: 3.8 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

İlker Çatak: *director*
Leonie Benesch: *actress*, Carla Nowak
Leonard Stettinisch: *actor*, Oskar

DATE: May 19, 2024

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE TEACHERS' LOUNGE**

The 2023 Oscar nominated German film, *The Teachers' Lounge*, won numerous international festival and audience awards including the 2023 PSIFF best foreign language film. A film critic said it is a masterclass in playground politics, a study in power dynamics, with themes of truth, justice, racism, respect, and children's rights.

It all takes place within a German middle school, which could be perceived as a microcosm of society, where a series of small thefts have occurred. A staff investigation, requiring students in Carla Nowak's 7th grade math class to show how much money is in their wallets, leads to one of her students being accused of stealing due to the unusual amount of cash he has in his wallet. Carla has to sit in on a conference with the boy and his parents as they explain that they gave him the money so he could buy a videogame and suggest that their son is a suspect because they are Turkish; he is being unfairly accused and they feel humiliated. Sensitive to racist tendencies in the school, Carla who is Polish but speaks only German even with another Polish teacher, decides to investigate on her own.

The next time she's on break in the teachers' lounge, she keeps her laptop open with the video camera secretly running, while she walks away for a short period of time. When she returns, she finds some cash missing from the wallet she left in her inside coat pocket. The video recording shows somebody taking money from her wallet but we only see someone's arm, just one sleeve of a blouse with a star pattern on it. The same star pattern as the blouse worn by the office admin, Friederike, who gave Carla a hard time earlier. Friederike is the single mother of Oskar, a boy in Carla's advanced math class. Carla decides to confront Friederike, to give her the opportunity to admit to the theft. We can see that actions are beginning to spiral and will only get worse. Friederike insists she is innocent and accuses Carla of illegally taking videos on her laptop. Both are placed under investigation by the school management and Friederike is suspended from her admin job which makes Oskar very angry at his teacher. As events, actions, accusations, prejudices, and mistrust, escalate, Carla finds all the students protesting against her including outraged parents. Oskar is also suspended but insists on taking his seat in the classroom. As emotions boil over, the ending is surprising, and is open to different interpretations.

We didn't have a school teacher on our zoom discussion, but two local teachers provided their insightful comments post discussion:

-One recently retired teacher thought that the film was an interesting study of how a challenging situation is mishandled by one teacher and sadly resulted in the unraveling of all of her relationships at the school. It was a bold step for her to set up her computer to record the thief in action. Most new teachers, especially new to a school, would never think to do that. What was the senior administrator doing to handle the situation? Why didn't the staff hire the Private Eye as the veteran teacher suggested? It seemed a bit unrealistic that the new teacher would take things into her own hands. The actress playing the teacher was excellent as were the kids. The film highlighted the many roles a teacher plays within the school environment and how difficult it can be, especially when dealing with challenging students and/or parents. The entire class and all of the parents ganging up against the teacher was a little far-fetched. Some yes, but not all.

-Another teacher had a similar reaction to the film but added the following points. The main message is to think first before you act. The teacher should have learned the culture of the school first before putting the problem into her own hands. If she had used the support from her colleagues, it wouldn't have been as painful: two heads are better than one. Don't be too quick to judge and things aren't always what they seem are important messages. Initially, Carla had good classroom control because they trusted their teacher. They also responded academically to her methods of teaching. After the incident, the students were impacted by what their parents had to say and it damaged her reputation. The students lost respect for her. Good students get drawn into the bad behavior. The ending showed a win for both Carla and Oskar. He stood his ground.

We agreed that Leonie Benesch was outstanding in her performance. It was a gripping, emotional story as her world falls apart. We admired her idealism, dedication, and insistence on finding the truth. One discussion participant noted that we know nothing about her personal life outside the classroom. The director addresses this question in an interview saying we learn more about a person by how they handle a challenging situation. We also admired Oskar's loyalty to his mother. The cinematography was excellent especially being filmed all in a single building except for a couple scenes outside the classroom window. Our favorite scene was seeing a multitude of people walking down the crowded school hallway all wearing the same shirt with the star pattern, a clever way to show that Carla was also questioning her assumption about what she saw in her video. Lots of high scores for what one discussion participant described as a tension filled page turner.

We graded *The Teachers' Lounge* a B+ or 3.8 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!
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